
CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

CPS remains a controversial and “noisy” business despite DFS progress.

In our 1999 evaluation of *Child Protective Services*, we noted that child protection is one of the most controversial functions of state government. Daily, caseworkers confront the dilemma of needing to protect children from abuse and neglect, while often trying to reunite them with neglectful or abusive families. As one DFS administrator said, “Some of the cases we deal with really do require the wisdom of Solomon. The families don’t know what to do. The judges don’t know what to do.” Another stakeholder told us, “Everyone feels competent to offer an opinion on [CPS] work ... Even if the system was perfect, it would still be noisy; this will never be a quiet business.”

CPS is more transparent, data driven, and family focused than in 1999.

These circumstances have not changed since our 1999 evaluation and likely never will, but DFS has made considerable progress in the intervening nine years. CPS is moving toward greater transparency with changes such as the multiple response system, the family-centered practice model, analysis of WYCAPS data, and the quality assurance tool of the state CFSR. DFS maintains these are the fundamental pieces of a strong foundation for a CPS system, one that has yet to fully mature.

Setting aside systemic issues that are beyond one agency’s control, DFS can do more to continue improving its own processes. We expect DFS to remain dedicated to the track system for screening and accepting CA/N reports, but we are concerned that as currently used, it is not a truly differentiated response system. DFS needs to ensure that workers are tracking all accepted reports, and that supervisors are consistently adhering to policy when assigning tracks. We also recommend that DFS give heightened scrutiny to cases in which families have had multiple incidents.

For the most serious CA/N reports, workers need to do a better job of documenting and summarizing their investigations. DFS should also put more emphasis on ensuring the safety of children who remain in their homes after substantiated reports, by

***Serious CA/N
reports need greater
safety assurances
for children
remaining at home.***

clarifying policies regarding safety and risk assessments, by conducting in-home visits with these families, and with follow-up contact after incidents are closed. It needs to diligently scrutinize central registry reports that individuals are “under investigation.” Finally, we believe DFS still has work to do to meet our 1999 recommendation that it systematically evaluate CPS casework and administrative processes for its own management purposes.